



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORY AMONG  
MALAYSIAN MANAGERS AND  
ITS IMPACT ON THE LEADER-MEMBER  
EXPECTATION GAP**

**ANUSUIYA AIP SUBRAMANIAM**

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**IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORY AMONG MALAYSIAN MANAGERS AND  
ITS IMPACT ON THE LEADER-MEMBER EXPECTATION GAP**

**By**

**ANUSUIYA A/P SUBRAMANIAM**

**Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Management, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of  
Science**

**August 2008**



## DEDICATION

**This thesis is dedicated to:**

***My Beloved Family Members:***

Late Grandfather, Mr. M. Velayutham,  
Grandmother, Madam K. Athilechumi,  
Parents, Mr. V. Subramaniam & Mrs. K. Susila,  
Younger Brothers, S. Aneesh Veloo & S. Arvind Veloo,  
Aunties or better perceived as my God Mothers,  
Miss V. Meenachi & Miss V. Jayaletchumy,  
Uncles, Mr. V. Kanapathy, Mr. V. Jaganathan & Mr. V. Jeyaprakasam,  
Aunties, Mrs. M. Susila & Mrs. K. Thiagavalli,  
Younger Cousin Brothers, J. Ananth Veloo & J. Ashwin Veloo &  
Younger Cousin Sisters, K. Kalpana, K. Athi Piriya & J. Athi Nitya



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

**IMPLICIT LEADERSHIP THEORY AMONG MALAYSIAN MANAGERS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LEADER-MEMBER EXPECTATION GAP**

By

**ANUSUIYA A/P SUBRAMANIAM**

**AUGUST 2008**

Chair: Professor Rozhan Othman, PhD

Faculty: Graduate School of Management

Implicit leadership theory (ILT) examines leadership as seen by followers while other theories describe what leaders are or do. The main objective of this study is to identify ILT among Malaysian managers and the impact of the expectation gap on leader-member exchange (LMX) quality and subsequently on the perception of job satisfaction and turnover intention. This study's main research question is whether the different ethnic groups in Malaysia are associated with different ILT. The relationship between leadership expectation gap and the different ethnic groups in Malaysia was examined. The effect of demographic dissimilarities (differences in ethnic background and nationality of superior and subordinate) on the subordinates' leadership expectation gap is also tested. Duration of subordinates' relationship with the superior was included as a moderating variable in the leadership expectation gap – LMX quality relationships and also in the demographic dissimilarities – leadership expectation gap relationships. LMX quality was included as the mediating variable in the leadership expectation gap – work-related outcomes (job satisfaction and turnover intention) relationships.



The individual subordinates who work under the supervision of Malaysian and Japanese superiors were the units of analysis. The respondents were selected from Japanese MNCs listed in the Japan-Malaysia Trade Directory Web Page and the questionnaires were posted to employees of 5 Japanese MNCs listed in this directory. Purposive sampling was used. Out of 200 distributed questionnaires, 137 were completed and usable responses.

The results reveal that the different ethnic groups in Malaysia are associated with different implicit leadership theories. Several results were contrary to expectations where demographic dissimilarities did not have an effect on the subordinates' leadership expectation gap. Duration of subordinates' relationship with the superior did have moderating effects on the leadership expectation gap – LMX quality relationships, but did not have moderating effects on the demographic dissimilarities – leadership expectation gap relationships. LMX quality partially mediates the leadership expectation gap – work-related outcomes (job satisfaction and turnover intention) relationships.

From the preliminary search of literature, there seems to be no study that explored the Malaysian ILT. Thus, the present study provides a first real insight into the nature of ILT among Malaysian managers. It specifically examined the relationship between leadership expectation gap and LMX in Malaysia and its impact on job satisfaction and turnover intention. In conclusion, this study can be a stepping stone for other researchers to embark on studies concerning ILT in the Malaysian context.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**TEORI KEPIMPINAN TERSIRAT DI KALANGAN PENGURUS DI  
MALAYSIA DAN KESANNYA TERHADAP JURANG JANGKAAN KETUA-  
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Teori kepimpinan tersirat (ILT) menilai kepimpinan dari pandangan pengikut. Teori lain lebih tertumpu kepada persoalan mengenai tugas-tugas ketua. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji ILT di kalangan pengurus di Malaysia dan kesan jurang jangkaan ke atas kualiti “pertukaran ketua-ahli” (LMX) dan kesannya ke atas kepuasan pekerjaan dan niat untuk meninggalkan organisasi. Persoalan utama kajian ini adalah sama ada kumpulan-kumpulan etnik di Malaysia mempunyai ILT yang berlainan. Kajian juga dijalankan untuk meneliti hubungan di antara jurang jangkaan kepimpinan dan kepelbagaian etnik di Malaysia. Kesan ketidaksamaan demografi (kelainan dari segi latar belakang etnik dan kewarganegaraan subordinat dan penyelia) ke atas jurang jangkaan kepimpinan telah dikaji. Tempoh perhubungan di antara subordinat dan penyelia disertakan sebagai pembolehubah penyederhanaan di dalam hubungan antara jurang jangkaan kepimpinan dan kualiti LMX, serta di dalam hubungan antara ketidaksamaan demografi dan jurang jangkaan kepimpinan. Kualiti LMX pula disertakan sebagai pembolehubah pengantara di dalam hubungan antara jurang jangkaan

keimpinan dan hasil yang berkaitan dengan kerja (kepuasan pekerjaan dan niat untuk meninggalkan organisasi).

Unit analisis adalah subordinat yang bertugas di bawah kepimpinan penyelia yang terdiri daripada warganegara Malaysia dan juga Jepun. Responden kajian ini dipilih dari direktori “Japan-Malaysia Trade Directory Web Page”. Senarai soal selidik dihantar kepada pekerja di 5 syarikat subsidiari Jepun yang disenaraikan di dalam direktori tersebut. Daripada sejumlah 200 senarai soal-selidik, sebanyak 137 respons adalah lengkap dan boleh digunakan.

Keputusan yang didapati menunjukkan bahawa kumpulan-kumpulan etnik di Malaysia sememangnya mempunyai ILT yang berlainan. Beberapa keputusan adalah di luar jangkaan, di mana ketidaksamaan demografi tidak mempunyai sebarang kesan terhadap jurang jangkaan kepimpinan. Tempoh perhubungan di antara subordinat dan penyelia sememangnya berfungsi sebagai pembolehubah penyederhanaan dalam hubungan antara jurang jangkaan kepimpinan dan kualiti LMX, tetapi tidak berfungsi sebagai pembolehubah penyederhanaan dalam hubungan antara ketidaksamaan demografi dan jurang jangkaan kepimpinan. Kualiti LMX pula menjadi sebahagian pengantara di dalam hubungan antara jurang jangkaan kepimpinan dan hasil yang berkaitan dengan kerja (kepuasan pekerjaan dan niat untuk meninggalkan organisasi).

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I certify that an Examination Committee met on **26th August 2008** to conduct the final examination of **Anusuiya a/p Subramaniam** on her **Master of Science** thesis entitled **“Implicit Leadership Theory among Malaysian Managers and Its Impact on the Leader-Member Expectation Gap”** in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or any other institutions.



---

**ANUSUIYA A/P SUBRAMANIAM**

Date: 24 December 2008

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ILT	Implicit Leadership Theory
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange
MNCs	Multi-National Corporations
CILS	Chinese Implicit Leadership Scale
MSQ	Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
<	Less than
>	More than



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Chapter one presents an introduction of the main theme of this study, which is implicit leadership theory (ILT). This chapter includes the background, the statement of problem as well as the objectives of this study. The section on the statement of problem of this study also included this study's research questions. The significance of the study as well as organisations of the thesis is described in separate sections of this chapter.

### 1.2 Background

Leadership is an area with universal appeal and much has been written about it in the popular press and academic research literature (Northouse, 1997). Throughout the years, there have been as many as 65 different classification systems developed to describe the dimensions of leadership (Fleishman et al., 1991). However, the common component to almost all of the classifications is that leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals toward goal attainment (Northouse, 1997).

Literature review shows that it is essential to address issues that confront followers as well as those that confront leaders since leaders and followers are both a part of the leadership process (Northouse, 1997). Additionally, leaders and followers need to be

understood in relation to each other. One of the areas that have attracted researcher interest is on leadership schemas.

Leadership schemas are the perception an individual has regarding traits and behaviours that are associated with an ideal leader. Kenney et al. (1996) found that these schemas are embedded in a person's memory and recalled when they have to deal with leaders. When it is recalled, the basic structures generate expectations regarding characteristics and behaviours of a leader. Lord and his colleagues (Lord and Emrich, 2001; Lord and Maher, 1991) proposed that leadership schemas are critical cognitive mechanisms, by which perceptions on leadership effectiveness are formed. This explains why a leader is seen as effective by particular followers but not by others.

Researchers examining leadership schemas have identified the image people have regarding leaders (Calder, 1977; Fiske, 1993; Kenney et al., 1994; Kinder et al., 1980; Lord et al., 1984; Philips and Lord, 1981; Simonton 1987). According to Lord et al. (1984), ideal leaders are assumed to be competent, caring, honest, understanding, outgoing, verbally skilled, determined, aggressive, decisive, dedicated, educated, kind and well dressed.

According to Goethals (2005), these diverse approaches, describing leadership schemas, prototypes or implicit leadership theories characterize people's beliefs concerning leaders at different levels of specificity. He noted that what is common to all of them is the idea that people do have a schema regarding leadership, which forms a standard for judging leaders.

There is a tendency for followers to attribute the leader's behaviour to "intrinsic leadership ability, or charisma," and to "build a charismatic leadership personality for that person" once followers have determined that a person qualifies as a leader (Hogg, 2001). Goethals (2005) noted that leadership schemas are used to assess leaders or potential leaders. In addition, it can have a profound effect regarding what personal characteristics are attributed to a person who has been judged to meet the leadership standard. This schema is also termed a person's implicit leadership theory (ILT).

ILT is an object of interest, as a means of understanding leader attributions and perceptions (Lord et al., 1984). It is essential to examine leadership attributions and perceptions in determining whether an individual will be accepted as a formal or informal leader in a group and the level of his/her influence over others within an organisation. Thus, ILT is based on followers' beliefs concerning how leaders behave in general and the behaviour they expect from leaders (Den Hartog et al., 1999).

According to ILT, the label "leader" is used as a cognitive category to classify individuals as either leaders or non-leaders (Lord et al., 1986; Calder, 1977). Based on the categorization, expectations and predictions are formed through implicit theories (knowledge structures, cognitive frameworks, beliefs, assumptions). Therefore, implicit leadership theories indicate the attributes and behaviours that differentiate leaders from non-leaders, good from bad leaders and effective from ineffective leaders (Lord and Maher, 1991).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

There are limited studies on implicit leadership theories carried out in organisational context (Lord and Maher, 1991). The majority of the previous studies in implicit leadership theories used samples of undergraduate students in laboratory settings (for example, Cronshaw and Lord, 1987; Lord et al., 1984). Although much has been written at the conceptual level, the role of ILT and employees' leadership schemas in making sense of managerial behaviour in organisational setting remains relatively under researched (Epitropaki and Martin, 2004). Previous research on ILT shows that the match between implicit leadership theories and actual leadership behaviour can have an effect on both the follower ratings of leadership effectiveness (Nye and Forsyth, 1991) and on the relationship quality between leader and follower (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005).

As noted by Epitropaki and Martin (2005), they are not able to identify any studies that explored the match between implicit leadership theories and work-related outcomes, on either an empirical or a conceptual level. Lord and Maher's (1993) theory makes no explicit reference to the role of implicit leadership theories for work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment but emphasize only on the effects of leadership schemas on perceptions of leadership behaviours. This view was supported by Epitropaki and Martin (2005) who identified that differences between ILT and actual leadership behaviour which is also known as the leadership expectation gap were found to have effects on organisational commitment, job satisfaction and well-being through leader-member exchange (LMX).



Lord and Maher (1993) argued the potential existence of a feedback loop between the leadership expectation gap and leader behaviour perceptions. In other words, employees use an implicit– explicit matching process to develop an impression of the quality of the interactions they have with their manager. Additionally, the quality of the exchanges between the manager and employee could potentially affect how close employees perceive their manager to be to their implicit leader profile. As the actual behaviour of manager is aligned with the expectations of employees, this would generate enhanced liking and higher quality relationships with the leaders (Engle and Lord, 1997) as well as affect subordinate satisfaction with the leader and turnover (Hunt et al., 1990). Additionally, job satisfaction has been consistently found to be positively related to LMX (Major et al., 1995; Seers and Graen, 1984).

Most of the literature reviews show that the impact of LMX has been examined from the supervisor point of view and only few studies have looked at the impact of subordinate LMX on the subordinates' feeling toward the supervisor (Varma et al., 2005; Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). Therefore, there is a need to examine the influence of leadership expectation gap on the quality of LMX from the subordinates' point of view.

The gap between ILT and actual leadership behaviour can pose problems when leader and followers are from different cultures. This is due to different expectations of the role of leader. A superior with similar background as his subordinates is likely to be perceived more favourably (for example, closer to the ideal) than one with a completely different background (Wafa et al., 1999). For Multi-National Corporations (MNCs), this difference can affect effectiveness in leading locals.